

Fables and Sketches.

Dorset's Turning Point.

The day was cold and gray with driving mist and rain. The prairie, that in summer glowed with fire lilies, and scarlet painted cups, and in autumn was golden with sunflowers, was now a sodden waste, from which Dorset, never very attractive, rose like a collection of weather beaten fungi.

"A green Christmas, an' a full graveyard," croaked Grandpère Badger from his easy chair by the fire. "Par trees blowin' in the fall, means death'll some of us call. An' there was red lights in the sky, red as blood, for a sign to the unbelievin'.

As she bustled about, Tommy's brown eyes travelled around the cozy room, to avoid Grandpère Badger's shrunken figure and pallid face, in which shone two lustrous black eyes under shaggy black brows, which were the more noticeable from the cloud of white hair hanging about his cheeks.

"Sure sign o' death!" piped the old man rousing up. "Whose dorg be it, an' where be he pintin' at?"

Mrs. Badger opened the door, and leaned far out of it to catch sight of the brute. "It's Steinmeyer's Newfoundland pup," she announced after a moment, "and he's howling down Pine street."

"It aire a black pup, I'll be bound," croaked the old man with great interest. "A black dorg never howls for nothin'."

"Th' ain't nobody but mother an' me an' father on Pine street," said Tommy rising. "I reckon I'd better strike out."

"Don't fret," said Mrs. Badger, slipping another doughnut into the paper bag she held. "All signs fall in a wet time. Steinmeyer's block faces Pine street, too. Tell your mother the washing's beautiful this week."

"Nobody'd cry 't 'twere Steinmeyer or your pap," continued Grandpère Badger in his queer, dispassionate voice. "A drunkard-maker aire a pestilence, an' a drunkard aire a castaway, an' sure to come to a bad end."

"I hope my father'll turn over a new leaf," said Tommy, swallowing a sob. "He might be good's anybody, and then, lest the tears should run down his cheeks, he unceremoniously bounced into the street, and started for home at a brisk run."

He found his mother as he had left her, bending over the ironing table. Her face was flushed with heat and weariness, and was aged by trouble and overwork; but when it lit up with a smile, as it always did for Tommy, it was pathetically pretty.

"Did you see pa 'round Steinmeyer's," said the mother anxiously. "I heard old Jake Waters say this morning that tis Steinmeyer's birthday, and 'twill be free drinks all day."

"No, I didn't see anybody; I run lickity split," said Tommy bitterly. "I hate Steinmeyer! I s'ld think everybody'd hate him. He spoiled other folkses Christmas sides oun', and quite overcome with shame and grief, he sobbed aloud."

"Steinmeyer isn't all to blame," said the mother quietly. She had thought out many problems as she ironed. "We folks are to blame to let him keep such a—a misery factory. And he isn't the only saloon keeper, and your father could stay away from the place, and the root could. I don't believe what young Jr. Plum says about drunkards not

bein' s'ponsible. But if they ain't, the rich, smart folks are. They ought to drive Steinmeyer and the rest out of town as they would so many tigers."

"I hate Steinmeyer the most," said Tommy grinding his teeth. "He's got the biggest, worstest place, an' spoils father; Cobweb Hall's a good name for it. Anybody can see what that big web, and that black spider painted over his door means."

Meanwhile Grandpère Badger continued to prophesy that calamity impended over somebody, and unusual sounds floating from Cobweb Hall indicated that its proprietor was either absent or tipsy. This time he was the latter, an uncommon occurrence, for he was far too wise and observing a spider not to know the power of his own web.

The gloomy day soon ended in a still more gloomy night. The gas lights flared feebly, and the houses were dark, for the weather prompted one to draw curtains closely. But Steinmeyer's windows let the light of two handsome chandeliers far into the darkness, while two high-priced mahogany screens protected the bar and its frequenters from the scrutiny of the prejudiced public.

"I love you, Tommy," she said, taking his bandaged right hand in hers, and weeping over it in her self-restrained fashion, "I will love you as long as I live."

"I've got—to leave—ma with nobody but—pa," said Tommy, fixing his brown eyes gravely upon her wistful face, "an' I want you—to get your father—to promise not to sell him—any more rum. Don't seem like I could leave ma—with nobody but pa."

An unspeakable change fell upon the brown eyes, the tender mouth, the soft cheeks. Tommy was gone to that lovely land where there is neither sin nor pain nor tears.

On New Year's Day the presiding elder attended a strange funeral at Dorset. The big meeting-house which he had never seen half full before, was crowded. Before the communion table were two coffins—one large, in which lay Jacob Steinmeyer; one small, in which, smiling still, lay Tommy Jackson.

His own ruin and the agony of fear he had suffered for his cherished daughter had paralyzed Jacob Steinmeyer. He never rallied even long enough to be assured of her safety. "Went 'thout no chance fer nothin'," said Peter Bunker with expressive ambiguity, when explaining to his wife that thereafter his grocery would not contain "wet goods."

"Lord Jesus our Saviour and Redeemer, let Thy holy will be done" cried the presiding elder when he had concluded the sermon, which all who heard it remembered till they died.

"And from this solemn day may a new life begin in Dorset! And a new life did begin in Dorset. When a year had passed the saloons that remained had moved into cheap quarters in the back streets, and a brisk demand for lumber, nails and paint had sprung up. Where Cobweb Hall had stood a substantial brick block was going up in which there was to be a National Bank, a Savings Bank and a real estate office."

"Dorset's took a turn," said John Badger with satisfaction. "Never's ben nigh so prosperin'."

"Yes," said the presiding elder, whom he had invited to Sunday dinner, "starting up the kitchen fire with coal oil may have beneficent results for somebody. I s'pose that's the way Steinmeyer's place caught."

Mr. Badger nodded, "Cook was half drunk," he said. "Bat my since that hole went you've no idea how my men have prospered. More depends on the way a man spends, than on the amount he earns."

street windows. A new room had been prepared for his old playmate, and was to have been one of her Christmas surprises, but the curtain had not come in time. Ma'am Walker had shown him the pretty nest. He felt sure Louisa must now be in it. How he reached the room, and dragged Louisa to the window in the midst of smoke no grown man dared to face, was a question long debated, but he did. Strong arms grasped her and he was out of the window when, with a loud explosion, the building collapsed into a blazing ruin.

When Tommy came to himself he was conscious first that it was morning, and then that he saw his mother strangely pale and trembling. Something terrible oppressed him; it was hard to breathe, and he vaguely wondered what he was lying on, since he could feel nothing. His father's voice, harsh and broken, made matters clearer.

"To think my boy is goin' ter die for savin' a useless cripple! Don't talk to me about Steinmeyer. What happens to him don't matter."

"A green Christmas an' a full graveyard," piped a querulous voice not far away. "This an' a pow'ful year, wif signs in th' sky, an' fowks kin prepare fer th' Judgment Day."

"Ma," said Tommy with sudden recollection of the night, and recognizing the fact that he was in Mrs. Badger's best bedroom, "be I a goin' ter die?"

She could only bow her head, and a great wave seemed to sweep over him. He remembered with startling distinctness that he had taken a stem of fat, black currants from Mrs. Badger's bush without leave, the past summer, and that once he told the school mistress a black, black fib, that he might not say before everybody that his tardiness had been caused by the drunkenness of his father.

"Ma," howlspered after a moment, "I want Louisa."

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"I've got—to leave—ma with nobody but—pa," said Tommy, fixing his brown eyes gravely upon her wistful face, "an' I want you—to get your father—to promise not to sell him—any more rum. Don't seem like I could leave ma—with nobody but pa."

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"God moves in a mysterious way," piped Grandpère Badger, reflectively, in

his corner, and the presiding elder glancing keenly at the self-absorbed old figure, whispered "Amen" to himself. —Elizabeth Cummings, in the Union Signal.

"The wife of Dr. A—, a well-known clergyman, went up to the pulpit, after a sermon by a strange minister, to shake hands, and he said, 'The wife of Dr. A—, I presume? And she, with the confused idea that it might not be the Dr. A— whom he knew, said, 'Yes, one of them—as if he were a Mormon.' —Harper's Magazine.

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